

# Echoes of Eden

Rabbi Ari Kahn

## The Price of Hatred

It is often quoted in the name of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook that just as the Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred, it will be rebuilt due to baseless love. While this teaching sounds simple, it is in fact highly nuanced, and deserves more serious consideration.

The image that comes to mind when we hear the words “baseless hatred” is usually one of rampant, wanton violence, yet the precise definition of the hebrew phrase “*sin’at hinam*” leads us in a different direction altogether. The word *hinam* is more accurately translated as “free of charge” or “at no cost” in a monetary sense. Rather than hatred for no reason whatsoever, it implies hatred for which the price is somehow

incongruous or out of balance. The problem is not that we dislike people for no reason; generally, we all feel we have very good reasons to dislike the people we do. We may have been hurt, insulted, or, worst of all, ignored, and we develop a healthy animus toward the offender as we defend ourselves and our tattered egos. The problem is that more often than not, our response is not proportional: We “overcharge” for these real or perceived wrongs. The price is not right; we pay back with interest, and, as we all know, the Torah prohibits usury.

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If we were to be honest with ourselves, we would be forced to recognize that at times the other person had no intention to hurt. Our own insecurity and emotional fragility leads us to interpret the behavior or speech of others as malicious, even when no such malice was intended.

Here, then, is the dilemma: When Rav Kook's teaching is understood as an admonishment against baseless hatred, most of us can, with absolute honesty, categorically state that we are innocent. On the other hand, when we reframe the question and ask instead if we have ever overreacted, if we are guilty of

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exaggerated responses to real or perceived slights, I am afraid that many of us can answer in the affirmative. We are, in fact, quite guilty, but we are blind to our own malevolence, simply because we think the other person has earned every bit of it. Whatever hatred we have for them is not "free".

As far as the "baseless love" (and not "free love", which conjures up a completely different set of issues), we are taught by Rav Kook to love others even though they are undeserving. But is this the case? Are we not commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves? Our love for others is not "free" or baseless; it is grounded in the knowledge that every person is created in the image of God, and every Jew is a unique part of our collective, a beautiful piece in the mosaic of our peoplehood. By what right do we imagine that the love and support we should be giving is free? This other person is my brother, sister or cousin too-many-times removed. I am obligated by Jewish law to love and care for him, to worry about her and constantly consider how I can improve her life, to pray for each and every other Jew. They are me, and we are one.

And therein lies the rub: We have somehow learned to convince ourselves that the hatred we feel is well-deserved, while the love we are obligated to feel and express is unearned and is given to the undeserving. Undoubtedly, this is what Rav Kook truly intended to convey.

Judaism teaches us to see our world from God's perspective as well as our own. While we justify our hatred of others by focusing on the wrongs they have committed, from God's higher vantage point, our hatred for others is

*sinat hinam* – unearned, disproportionate, high-interest payback. While we consider our acts of kindness or gestures of love free and unearned, we are, in fact, fulfilling very specific obligations.

This dual perspective is discernible in this week's Parasha: Moshe recalls the episode of the spies and recounts:

And you grumbled in your tents, and said, 'God brought us out of the land of Egypt because He hated us...' (Deuteronomy 1:27)

Rashi points out what should be obvious to us: quite the opposite was the case. "He loved you, but you hated Him..."

Here we have the core of *sin'at hinam* – groundless hatred: lonely, frightened man, controlled by his own insecurity, is unable to feel God's love. Man's knee-jerk reaction is to lash out with hatred that is both baseless and unearned.

We remain a strange species, capable of love yet afraid to love. We fail to consider the true source and nature of love as our greatest natural resource, which grows exponentially the more it is "used". It makes us wonder why we are so stingy in sharing it with others.

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"If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love" Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (Orot HaKodesh vol. 3, p. 324)

For a more in-depth analysis see <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2009/07/dvarim-tisha-bav.html>